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Scripture as 'One Book': Origen, Jerome, and Cyril of Alexandria on Isaiah 29:11

Matthew R. Crawford

Based on the research of F. M. Abel and Alexander Kerrigan, parallels between the exegetical works of Cyril of Alexandria and Jerome have long been known. In this article I highlight a previously unnoticed parallel which is perhaps the most striking instance yet discovered, since it demonstrates Cyril following almost exactly the wording of his predecessor. In exegeting Isaiah 29:11 both Jerome and Cyril interpret the 'sealed book' mentioned in the passage as Scripture which is 'spoken by one Holy Spirit' and so 'is called one book.' Based on the cross references cited by Jerome, I further argue that Jerome's exegesis is indebted to Origen's argument, found in book five of his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, that the numerous individual books of Scripture are 'one book' in the divine Word who unites them. Thus, Origen's exegetical labors continued to have influence beyond the outbreak of the Origenist controversy, even among those authors who otherwise took issue with his legacy. Moreover, this instance highlights one way the patristic exegetical tradition developed, as later authors mined and redeployed the exegesis of their predecessors to meet new challenges in their own day.

In 1941 F. M. Abel drew attention to a number of 'parallels' between the exegetical works of Cyril of Alexandria and those of Jerome, particularly the commentaries on Isaiah and on the Twelve Prophets composed by each author. So numerous were the examples he adduced that he concluded there must either be 'a common source' for them both, likely Origen, or that Cyril had before him Jerome's works as he composed his own.¹ Alexander Kerrigan, writing a decade later, found more such parallels between the two authors, and thus stated, more boldly than had Abel, 'one thing alone is certain: St. Jerome's commentaries were on [Cyril's] writing-table.'² In this

1 F. M. Abel, 'Parallélisme exégétique entre S. Jérôme et S. Cyrille d'Alexandrie', *Vivre et Penser* 1e série (1941): 94-119, 212-30.

2 Alexander Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Interpreter of the Old Testament* (Roma:

article, I want to add to this standard account by highlighting a passage that was noted by neither of these previous two commentators, and which is unique among those examples already brought to light, in that here Cyril follows nearly the exact wording of Jerome. Moreover, Abel and Kerrigan suggested that Cyril was dependent upon Jerome especially for his exposition of textual or historical details or of Jewish traditions, whereas the example I will consider is of an explicitly theological nature. Furthermore, I intend, secondarily, to demonstrate that the exegesis of Jerome and that of Cyril draw upon a tradition going back to Origen that saw all of Scripture as ‘one book.’ This instance thus demonstrates the persisting influence of Origen’s exegetical erudition in the two decades immediately following the Origenist controversy of the late fourth-century, even within circles that otherwise did not welcome certain aspects of his theology.³ Moreover, even though all three authors emphasized Scripture as ‘one book,’ their presentation of this idea takes notably different forms, with Origen grounding Scripture’s unity solely in the one divine Word, while Jerome speaks of the one Spirit, and Cyril mentions both Christ and the one Spirit. As I will come back to at the end of this paper, the differing presentations of this same idea in each author are perhaps due to their varied polemical contexts.

I will first give the two texts from Jerome and Cyril that bear a striking similarity before then giving a fuller account of the argument of each author. Jerome, in commenting upon Isaiah

Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1952), 363. Cf. M. C. Pennacchio, “Quasi ursa raptis catulis’: Os 13, 8 nell’esegesi di Gerolamo e Cirillo di Alessandria’, *Vetera Christianorum* 32 (1995): 143-161, who looks at the specific case of Hosea 13:8.

³ On the Origenist controversy, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

29:9-12,⁴ notes that ‘all the Scriptures’ are

written by the one Holy Spirit and for this reason are called one book.

*uno scriptae sunt spiritu sancto; et propterea unus liber appellantur.*⁵

Cyril, in explaining the same text in his own commentary, writes,

The divinely inspired Scripture is sealed as one book. For it is all one, and has been spoken through the one Holy Spirit.

κατεσφραγίσθη . . . καθάπερ βιβλίον ἓν ἡ θεόπνευστος Γραφή. Ἐν γὰρ ἡ πᾶσα ἐστὶ καὶ
λελάληται δι’ ἐνὸς τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος.⁶

4 The passage as Jerome cites it reads, ‘Be astonished, and wonder, waver, and stagger, be drunk, and not with wine, you are being moved, and not with drunkenness. For the Lord has mingled for you the spirit of a deep sleep, he will shut your eyes the prophets, and he will cover your princes, who see visions. And the vision of all shall be unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which when they give it to one knows letters, they will say: Read this, and he will answer: I cannot, for it is sealed. And the book will be given to one who does not know letters, and it will be said to him: Read, and he will answer: I do not know letters.’

5 Jerome, *In Isaiam* 29:9-12 (Marcus Adriaen, *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera, Pars 1, Opera Exegetica* 2, CCSL 73 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1963), 373-4). I am grateful to Thomas P. Scheck for allowing me to consult his pre-publication translation of Jerome’s commentary. This passage from Jerome’s commentary is briefly discussed in Pierre Jay, *L’exégèse de saint Jérôme d’après son « Commentaire sur Isaïe »* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985), 383-4, who writes, ‘A l’unicité d’inspiration correspond donc l’unité des Écritures, ou, pour mieux dire, de l’Écriture.’ Jerome also cites Isaiah 29:11-12 in the prologue to his commentary (CCSL 73.2).

6 Cyril, *In Isaiam* 29:11-12 (PG 70.656). Unfortunately Cyril’s commentary suffers from having

I have underlined the corresponding portions of each authors' statement above in order to make the comparison clearer. The two passages are admittedly not identical. Jerome speaks of Scripture being 'written,' whereas Cyril has it being 'spoken.' Moreover, the order of the two halves of the assertion are reversed in Cyril's version, since he speaks first of Scripture as 'one book' and only then of the Spirit's authorship. Finally, Cyril does not present this statement as though it came from any other source than himself, so if he was drawing upon Jerome, he did not intend to make it explicit to his readers that he was doing so.

no modern critical edition besides that in *Patrologia Graeca*. Much of the work has recently been translated into English (covering Isaiah 1-50). See Robert Charles Hill, *Cyril of Alexandria: Commentary on Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2008-2009). I have consulted Hill's translation, but the translations in this article are my own. The passage from Cyril's commentary cited above has been briefly noted by Robert Louis Wilken, 'Cyril of Alexandria as Interpreter of the Old Testament,' in *The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, ed. Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 14; David Kneip, 'The Holy Spirit in Cyril of Alexandria's *Commentary on Isaiah*', in *The Old Testament as Authoritative Scripture in the Early Churches of the East*, Bible in the Christian Orthodox Tradition 1, ed. Vahan S. Hovhannessian (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 49-50. Wilken quite rightly notes that in Cyril's thought 'The Bible's unity came from Christ,' but does not explain how this Christological unity also depends upon the Spirit's inspiration, as implied in the above passage. For the argument that Cyril's Isaianic commentary was written to provide training in basic grammatical exegesis for clergy see J. David Cassel, 'Cyril of Alexandria as Educator,' in *In Dominico Eloquio - In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul M. Blowers *et al.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 348-68.

Nevertheless, the two passages present clear similarities as well. Both authors ground Scripture's unity as one book in the Spirit's authorship. This basic point is not at all uncommon in patristic literature, nor is the description of the Spirit as the 'one Spirit' who inspired Scripture.⁷ However, what is more unusual about the above passages is the explicit numerical link suggested between the 'one Spirit' and the 'one book' that is Scripture. Moreover, both Jerome and Cyril are commenting upon the same biblical text, Isaiah 29:11. For these reasons it seems clear that either Cyril was reading Jerome as he composed his own commentary, or both authors used some third, common source. The only other major commentary on Isaiah to have survived from this period that covers this text, that of Eusebius of Caesarea, omits the point made here by Jerome and Cyril as well as the cross-references they use as evidence for their reading.⁸ Lost commentaries that could have served as a common source include those authored by Origen, Apollinaris, and Didymus.⁹ Even though it is impossible to completely rule out the possibility that both Jerome and Cyril drew independently upon some third source, it seems more likely that Cyril had direct recourse to Jerome's commentary, especially in light of the many other parallels between the two

7 See, e.g., Theophilus of Antioch, *Autol.* 2.35; 3.12; Epiphanius, *anc.* 94.9; *pan.* 66.85.11; Cyril of Jerusalem, *cat.* 16.4; 17.5; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *In Nahum* 1:1.

8 See Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Isaiam* 1.96 (Joseph Ziegler, *Eusebius Werke IX. Der Jesajakommentar*, GCS (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975), 189-91). The *Commentary on Isaiah* of pseudo-Basil only goes through Isaiah 16, and so does not cover the text at hand. Moreover, the surviving fragments of the *Commentary on Isaiah* attributed to Theodore of Heraclea do not include an extract covering this text (PG 18.1320).

9 Origen's commentary is mentioned in Eusebius, *EH* 6.32.1. Jerome mentions the commentaries of Apollinaris and Didymus in the prologue to his own commentary (CCSL 73.3-4).

authors that have been adduced by Abel and Kerrigan. The slight differences in wording between the two statements may be explained as Cyril's either conscious or unconscious paraphrasing of his source.

Jerome and Cyril on Isaiah 29:11

I now want to look the exegesis of Jerome and Cyril a bit more closely in order to tease out the similarities and differences between their expositions. Jerome treats all of Isaiah 29:9-12 together, as a unit, and, as usual, begins his explanation by commenting on the different readings of the LXX, Theodotion, Aquila, and the Hebrew text. He then asserts that, since Isaiah 29:1-8 is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (as he has just explained in the previous section of the commentary), so now these following verses are also 'against the scribes and the Pharisees.' Alluding to Luke 11:52, Jerome describes these persons as 'having the key of knowledge' yet 'not entering themselves, nor allowing others to enter.' Because they refused to hear the 'Lord and Savior' when he came by shutting their eyes and ears, so now the Lord is repaying them in similar fashion by closing their eyes, which are the prophets, 'through whom [they] saw the knowledge of God.' In contrast to the Jews who become blind are 'the people of the nations' who now see (Isa. 29:18-19) and 'gaze upon the Lord' (John 9:39).¹⁰

As a result of their divinely induced blindness, Jerome says that 'all of Holy Scripture' is 'shut and sealed' to them, such that even though they may 'know the letters of the law and of the prophets' (*legis litteras et prophetarum uaticinia*), still they will 'not understand what [they] are reading' (*non intellegatis, quod legitis*). To elucidate the meaning of the 'sealed book' of Isaiah 29:11, he points to Revelation 5:2-5 which also speaks of a book bearing seals, which can only be opened

¹⁰ Jerome, *In Isaiam* 29:9-12 (CCSL 73.373).

by the 'lion from the tribe of Judah.' Jerome explains that,

the lion from the tribe of Judah is the Lord Jesus Christ, who breaks the seals of the book, not specifically of one book, namely of the Psalms of David, as many think (*ut multi putant*), but of all the Scriptures (*omnium scripturarum*), which are written by one Holy Spirit and for this reason are called one book.

The identity of those who suppose that Jesus breaks the seals only of the Psalms and not of all of Scripture remains unclear, though, as we shall see momentarily, this allusive remark has a parallel in Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* wherein it makes more sense. As further prooftexts that it is 'all of Scripture' that is one sealed book, rather than simply one component part such as Jeremiah or Isaiah, Jerome alludes to Ezekiel 2:9 and then cites Psalm 39:8 (LXX) ('In the chapter of the book it is written about me.'). both texts that also speak of divinely authored scrolls or books. He concludes his exposition of this passage by stating his point once again. The 'Jews up to the present day' are unable to understand the Scriptures because they are unable to 'open the seals' and 'unfold its mysteries.'¹¹

We should note at least two further relevant points about Jerome's exegesis in this passage. First, though the biblical text at hand speaks of a 'sealed book,' it nowhere makes mention of 'one book.' For this reason, it seems that the idea of there being only 'one book' that is sealed appears to have been brought into Jerome's exegesis from somewhere else. As I will demonstrate below, the notion of 'one book' arises in Jerome's explanation because Isaiah 29:11 was one of a group of texts that Origen had previously used to emphasize the unity of the various books of Scripture. Second, the mention of the Spirit as that which grounds the unity of this 'one book' also stands out, since the Spirit does not appear in the biblical passage. In fact, nowhere else in Jerome's exposition of Isaiah 29:9-12, which occupies several paragraphs, does he discuss the Spirit. The Spirit appears in this one sentence to serve the purpose of grounding Scripture's unity

¹¹ Jerome, *In Isaiam* 29:9-12 (CCSL 73.374).

as 'one book,' but plays no further role in Jerome's exegesis. It is unclear what to make of the mention of the Spirit, but we might suppose that this is another element which Jerome could be importing from an outside source.

Cyril's interpretation of the passage is fundamentally in keeping with that of Jerome, although he adds a few distinct touches to it. Following his usual exegetical approach, he takes the events of Isaiah 29:1ff in two senses, since 'what occurred in shadows among the ancients are types of the reality' (Τύποι γὰρ τῶν ἀληθῶν τὰ ὡς ἐν σκιαῖς τοῖς ἀρχαιοτέροις συμβεβηκότα.). On the 'factual level' the passage refers to 'something that happened' (τι τῶν ἱστορικῶς γεγονότων) during David's reign. However, in a spiritual sense, the text 'refers to those warring against Christ from the synagogue of the Jews.' In other words, for Cyril, as the blind and lame inhabitants of Jebus resisted David's assault (2 Sam. 5:6-8), so the 'lame and blind inhabitants of Jerusalem opposed Christ, the Savior of all, during the time of his sojourn.'¹² In the rest of his exposition of this chapter, Cyril expends little effort providing further explication of the first level of the text, and instead focuses exclusively on the fate of the Jews in the first century, effectively collapsing the distance between Israel in Isaiah's day and the scribes and Pharisees of the gospels. In this respect his interpretation is broadly in keeping with that of Jerome, even though he, as usual, chooses not to include any of his predecessor's comments on the textual variations of the differing versions.

With this basic framework in place, Cyril, for the most part, follows Jerome's lead in interpreting the 'sealed book' of Isaiah 29:11. Like the earlier exegete, he interprets the sealing as an act of judgment upon faithless Israel:

Since they put the tutor (τὸν παιδαγωγὸν) to shame, and regarded the law from God as worthy of no honor, by turning instead to 'teachings and commandments of men' (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8-9), so in a suitable manner the book of the divinely inspired Scripture 'was sealed,' (κατεσφραγίσθη . . . τὸ τῆς θεοπνεύστου Γραφῆς

12 Cyril, *In Isaiam* 29:1-4 (PG 70.645-8).

βιβλίον) and reasonably so; it was not fitting to enrich with understanding of the divinely inspired Scripture those who despised it.¹³

As hinted at in the above reference to Christ as the ‘tutor,’ Cyril’s main contribution to the prior tradition of interpretation is his more explicit rooting of this judgment in a Christological reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. To validate this point he cites John 5:39-40 and 5:46 in which Jesus asserts that the Hebrew Scriptures testify to himself, two passages that the archbishop cites frequently for this purpose.¹⁴ Following this principle, Cyril faults the Jews for failing to read their own text correctly. If they had truly honored their sacred text, they would have also honored Christ, ‘the tutor,’ about whom it spoke. Instead, because they ‘killed the one foretold through it,’ ‘the divinely inspired Scripture was sealed, in a certain manner, by God, as if it were one book. For it is all is one book, and has been spoken through one Holy Spirit.’ The meaning of this ‘sealing’ in Cyril’s view is that to the Jews the ‘meaning’ (δύναμιν) of Scripture would henceforth be ‘utterly incomprehensible’ (ἄληπτον παντελῶς).¹⁵

The main points of Cyril’s exegesis are in keeping with Jerome. Both see the ‘sealing’ mentioned by the prophet as a judgment from God, and both interpret the ‘sealing’ to mean that

13 Cyril, *In Isaiam* 29:13 (PG 70.656-7).

14 As noted in Robert L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria’s Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 64-5, 82, 175. For example, he cites John 5:46 four times in his *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*. See *In Abacuc* 3:9-10; *In Zachariam* 4:11-14; *In Malachiam* 2:5; 4:6 (P. E. Pusey, *Sancti Patrist Nostri Cyrilli Archiepiscopi Alexandrini in XII Prophetas*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1868), ii.147, 347, 575, 626. He cites the same passage two other times in his *Commentary on Isaiah: In Isaiam* 5:25; 33:5-6 (PG 70.165, 721).

15 Cyril, *In Isaiam* 29:11-12 (PG 70.653-6).

the Jews could no longer understand their Scriptures. Furthermore, as I noted above with respect to Jerome, so also in Cyril's exposition, the notion of Scripture being 'one book' does not arise from the Isaianic text itself, and in fact it plays no other role for him aside from its brief appearance in this one line. In addition, the highlighting of the Spirit's role is as unexpected in Cyril's explanation as it is in Jerome. Though elsewhere Cyril emphasizes the necessity of the Spirit for interpreting Scripture¹⁶, he does not in this instance make any further mention of the Spirit. The fact that the theme of Scripture as 'one book spoken by one Holy Spirit' fits somewhat awkwardly into Cyril's exegesis of the passage further implies that he is here drawing this idea from another source.

Even though Cyril follows Jerome's basic point, we should note the differences in the way each author fills out this point. Cyril cites none of Jerome's cross references and instead adds two that are characteristically his own, both of which undergird a Christological reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. Therefore, Cyril's main contribution to the earlier exegesis of Jerome is his increased emphasis on a Christological reading of the Old Testament as the key which unlocks the 'sealed book' that is Scripture, though this notion is also implicit in Jerome's treatment of the passage insofar as he presents Christ as the lion from Judah who breaks the seals. The idea that Christ is the focus of all scriptural exegesis is a hallmark of Cyril's broader corpus and is no doubt related to his sometimes tense interactions with the Jews of Alexandria, so it is not surprising to find it surfacing here in his exegesis of Isaiah 29:11-12.¹⁷ However, even if the notion of Christological

16 See, for example Cyril, *In Joannem* 17:16-17 (P. E. Pusey, ed., *Sancti patris nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Joannis evangelium*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872), ii.715).

17 Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, focuses especially upon Cyril's interaction with Jews as the archbishop of Alexandria and the influence this had upon his scriptural exegesis.

exegesis is unquestionably Cyrilline, the description of Scripture as 'one book' is less so. Though Cyril certainly treats all of Scripture as a unity pointing to Christ, and though he on occasion refers to the 'one Spirit' who speaks therein, he nowhere else describes the entire Bible as 'one book.'¹⁸ Because the idea of Scripture as 'one book' inspired by 'one Holy Spirit' is not present in the Isaianic text itself, and because the notion of 'one book' is not typical of Cyril's broader corpus, it seems most likely that the language he turns to here in exegeting Isaiah 29:11-12 comes from another source, namely from Jerome. This correlation serves as further evidence that Cyril, writing his commentary in the 410s or early 420s, relied upon the Isaianic commentary of Jerome composed only a few years earlier between 408-410.¹⁹

On Cyril's exegesis see also John J. O'Keefe, 'Christianizing Malachi: Fifth-Century Insights from Cyril of Alexandria,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 50 (1996): 136-58. As Cyril said in his work dealing with the Pentateuch, Christ becomes the 'fullness of the law and the prophets,' when 'every prophetic and legal oracle looks toward him and has been turned towards him' (*De adoratione* I (PG 68.140)). On Cyril's attitude towards the Jews as expressed in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, see Daniel Keating, 'Supersessionism in Cyril of Alexandria,' *Studia Patristica* (forthcoming 2013).

18 J. David Cassel, 'Key Principles in Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis,' *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001): 413-5, highlights Cyril's sense of the Bible's overall unity as a key principle in his exegesis. For references to the 'one Spirit' who speaks in Scripture, see *Juln.* 1.34; *In Isaiam* 41:1 (PG 70.828). See also *ador.* IV (PG 68.352) where Cyril refers to Daniel 7:10, a passage to which Origen also referred (see below), to suggest that the 'books above' that speak of Christ are 'many and not one book.'

19 On the date of Jerome's commentary, see Jay, *L'exégèse de saint Jérôme*, 66-67. On the date of Cyril's commentary, see G. Jouassard, 'L'activité littéraire de saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie jusqu'à 428: Essai de chronologie et de synthèse,' in *Mélanges E. Podechard* (Lyon: Facultés catholiques,

Origen's Argument that Scripture is 'One Book'

In the next section of this article I want to go back roughly two centuries before Jerome and Cyril in order to demonstrate that Jerome's argument derives from Origen's earlier treatment of this passage. Ronald Heine has recently draw attention to Origen's frequent usage of the concept of Scripture as a 'sealed book,' an idea that he drew from Isaiah 29:11.²⁰ As noted above, Origen's Isaianic commentary is lost, so we do not have what was probably his fullest treatment of the passage. However, the surviving portion of the fifth book from his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* alludes to the verse and also presents several clear parallels with Jerome's exegesis above. In the opening to book five of the commentary, Origen is attempting to give some justification to his patron Ambrose for his having already composed many books on relatively few verses of the gospel. After all, Scripture itself warns against the making of many books (cf. Eccl. 12:12), and none of the saints has produced a great number of compositions. Solomon even asserted that it is

1945), 159-74, who puts it sometime between Cyril's elevation as bishop in 412 and his turn towards anti-Arian polemic in 423. Jouassard assumes, perhaps without sufficient justification, that Cyril would not have begun composing his exegetical works until after he became bishop in 412.

However, if I am right that in his exegesis of Isaiah 29:11 we see evidence of Jerome's influence upon Cyril, then we have a definite *terminus post quem* for Cyril's commentary.

20 Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117, who calls it one of his 'favorite passages' on the issue of the obscurity of Scripture. See his use of Isaiah 29:11-12 in the following passages: *Jo.* 13.48.315; *hom. Num.* 13.2; *comm. Mt.* 11.11. See also the preface to Origen's lost *Commentary on the Psalms*, preserved in Epiphanius, *pan.* 64.6-7.

impossible to escape from sin if one uses many words (Prov. 10:19).²¹ How then can Origen's lengthy composition be justified?

Origen's initial response to this apparent difficulty is to problematize the literal sense of the text. Solomon himself, presumably the author of Ecclesiastes, composed thousands of proverbs (3 Kings 5:12-13 (LXX)), and Paul the Apostle taught all through the night on one occasion (Acts 20:7-10). If both of these outstanding figures of biblical history escaped sin while using many words, then the obvious, literal sense of Ecclesiastes 12:12 and Proverbs 10:19 must be insufficient. Having set aside the plain sense of these passages, Origen establishes their true significance on a higher plane:

The complete Word of God who was in the beginning with God is not a multitude of words (πολυλογία), for it is not words (λόγοι). For it is one word (λόγος . . . εἷς) which has united many ideas, each of which is a part of the whole word.²²

In other words, for Origen, the unity of the one divine Word serves also to unify the many other words which are composed by humans. This assertion is in keeping with his broader theological principle that the Son is the grounds for unity in the world of multiplicity.²³ In light of this idea,

²¹ Origen, *In Joannem* 5.1-4.

²² Origen, *In Joannem* 5.5 (Cécile Blanc, *Origène: Commentaire sur saint Jean, Tome 1*, Sources Chrétiennes 120 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 380). Translation in Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 1-10*, The Fathers of the Church 80 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 163. My translation differs slightly from that of Heine.

²³ On this point see Rowan Williams, 'Origen: Between Orthodoxy and Heresy', in *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts*, ed. W. A. Bienert and U. Kühneweg (Leuven: University Press, 1999), 4, 12.

Origen then redefines what it means to speak ‘many words.’ On the one hand, whatever is outside of the one Word is not ‘a word’ but is instead ‘words,’ since it lacks ‘harmony and oneness.’ However, on the other hand, whoever speaks ‘the things of truth, even if he says everything so as to leave out nothing, always speaks the one Word.’ Applied to Scripture itself, this principle implies that ‘all the sacred works are one book, but those outside the sacred are many’ (ἐν βιβλίον τὰ πάντα ἅγια εἰπεῖν, πολλὰ δὲ τὰ ἔξω τούτων).²⁴

Origen’s description of Scripture as ἐν βιβλίον immediately recalls Jerome’s *unus liber* and Cyril’s βιβλίον ἐν. In fact, if we proceed a little further in Origen’s exposition we find several further parallels with Jerome, and at least one with Cyril. After presenting his theological argument for the unity of Scripture and of his books in the one divine Word, Origen turns next to find ‘evidence’ (μαρτύριον) from Scripture itself for this principle. Identifying the ‘one Word’ now as ‘Christ,’ Origen notes that statements concerning him are not written merely in ‘one book’ of Scripture, but rather in the Pentateuch, in the prophets, in the psalms, ‘and in general in all the Scriptures.’ The latter phrase ‘in all the Scriptures’ is an allusion to Luke 24:27, and to further buttress his case Origen cites John 5:39, the same passage that Cyril will later cite in his exposition of Isaiah 29:11.²⁵ Thus, the emphasis on Christological unity that comes to the fore in Cyril’s exegesis, yet which is no more than implicit in Jerome’s, is also evident in Origen’s commentary.

Nevertheless, from this point forward in Origen’s explanation further parallels with Jerome are readily apparent, especially in terms of the cross-references the Alexandrian cites. Origen first quotes Psalm 39:8, in which Christ says he has been written about in ‘the roll of the book.’ However, he recognizes a potential objection to this reading, since someone might suppose that

²⁴ Origen, *In Joannem* 5.5 (SC 120.382) (trans., Heine, 163).

²⁵ Origen, *In Joannem* 5.6 (SC 120.382).

Christ's statement in the psalm refers not to all of Scripture, but simply to the book of the psalms alone. In response Origen notes the lack of the demonstrative pronoun in the verse, which would presumably be required if the psalmist had intended to speak merely of the psalms.²⁶ It is not clear if Origen has specific individuals in mind in this section, but it is clear that here we have a parallel with Jerome's allusive remark that 'many suppose' that Christ breaks the seals of only the psalms of David. Jerome's mention of such persons stands a few lines before his citation of Psalm 39:8, so the connection between the two is not obvious, and as a result, it is unclear in his exposition why anyone would suppose that Christ only breaks the seals of the psalms. However, when placed back within Origen's original discussion, the notion makes more sense, since his mention of this idea follows on the heels of his citation of Psalm 39:8, and the question then naturally arises whether the statement of Psalm 39:8 refers simply to the book in which it occurs or more broadly to all of Scripture.

There are yet further parallels between Origen and Jerome. The mention of the 'scroll' of Psalm 39:8 leads Origen next to consider the 'sealed' scroll of Revelation 5:1-5, which can be opened only by the lion from the tribe of Judah. As noted above, Jerome mentions this same verse in his exposition of Isaiah 29:9-12. Origen follows with a brief discussion of Psalm 68:29, Daniel 7:10, and Exodus 32:31-32, none of which are cited by Jerome. However, he then turns to the 'sealed book' of Isaiah 29:11-12, paraphrasing the passage and asserting that in this text as well the same principle holds true that Scripture is united in the Word and can be opened only by Christ. Finally, Origen speaks of the 'book' mentioned by Ezekiel in Ezekiel 2:9-10 which contains 'lamentation, a song, and a woe.'²⁷ Jerome as well makes mention of Ezekiel's book, though he focuses on the fact

26 Origen, *In Joannem* 5.6 (SC 120.382-4).

27 Origen, *In Joannem* 5.6-7 (SC 120.384-6).

that it was written on the inside and the out, rather than on the contents of the book highlighted by Origen. Thus, even though Jerome does not follow every cross-reference noted by Origen, both authors mention Psalm 39:8, Revelation 5:1-5, Isaiah 29:11-12, and Ezekiel 2:9-10. This cluster of texts, plus the remark that some suppose only the psalms are sealed by Christ, leaves little doubt that Jerome relied heavily upon Origen when interpreting Isaiah 29:9-12 in his *Commentary on Isaiah*.²⁸

Other Examples of Jerome's Appropriation of Origen's Argument

Whether Jerome had recourse to this exact passage from the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* or instead to Origen's own lost Isaianic commentary is impossible to determine with certainty, and two further passages from Jerome's corpus suggests that either could have been possible. First is a passage in Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel*, in which he closely follows a homily of Origen on the same text, once again citing Isaiah 29:11. In his homily, Origen explains that the 'gate' in Ezekiel's vision which remains shut and through which no one but the Lord may enter (Ezek. 44:1-3), indicates that 'everything that is more mysterious is closed, and what is more manifest is opened and is not closed.' He then transitions from the 'closed gate' of Ezekiel to Scripture which is like a 'sealed book.' To support this reading Origen cites in quick succession first a harmonized version of Matthew 23:13 and Luke 11:52, then Isaiah 29:11-12, and next Revelation 5:2-5. Finally, appealing to 2 Corinthians 3:14-18, he concludes that only Christ can open the law

²⁸ Although Jay, *L'exégèse de saint Jérôme*, 383-4, discusses Jerome's exegesis of Isaiah 29:9-12, he does not note that Origen influenced Jerome in this instance. Manlio Simonetti, 'Sulle fonti del *Commento a Isaia* di Girolamo,' *Augustinianum* 24 (1984): 451-69, lists Origen as a source for Jerome, but does not mention this passage.

and the prophets that remained closed until his coming.²⁹ Though there is no mention here of Scripture as 'one book,' it is apparent that in this homily Origen is tapping into the same reservoir of biblical cross-references and theological reflection as in his Johannine exposition.

Jerome, who himself translated Origen's *Homilies on Ezekiel* into Latin (c.379-381), clearly relied upon Origen when interpreting this same passage in his own *Commentary on Ezekiel*, composed between 411 and 414.³⁰ In trying to identify Ezekiel's shut gate, Jerome consecutively cites the same harmonized version of Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:52, then Isaiah 29:11-12, and finally Revelation 5:5. Just a little further on he also relies on 2 Corinthians 3:18. Jerome's conclusion is that before the incarnation, 'the law and the prophets were closed, and all knowledge of the Scriptures were a closed paradise' (*clausa erat lex et prophetae et omnis scientia scripturarum, clausus erat paradisus*), but after the crucifixion and the rending of the temple veil 'all things have been opened' (*aperta sunt omnia*).³¹ The parallels between these two passages are sufficient to conclude that in this instance Jerome followed Origen's exegesis of Ezekiel's 'shut gate' in his homily, expressing a point very similar to his argument in the *Commentary on Isaiah*. If Origen

29 Origen, *In Ezechielem* 14.2 (Marcel Bourret, *Origène: Homélie sur Ézéchiël*, Sources Chrétiennes 352 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 436-38). See the translation in Thomas P. Scheck, *Origen: Homilies 1-14 on Ezekiel*, Ancient Christian Writers 62 (Mahwah, New Jersey: The Newman Press, 2010), 167-8.

30 On the date of Jerome's translation of Origen's *Homilies on Ezekiel*, see Bourret, *Homélie sur Ézéchiël*, 19; Scheck, *Homilies 1-14 on Ezekiel*, 3. On the date of Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel*, see François Glorie, *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera, Pars 1, Opera Exegetica* 4, CCSL 75 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1964), vii-viii.

31 Jerome, *In Hiezechielem* 44:1-3 (CCSL 75.643-44).

made this point both in his *Homilies on Ezekiel* as well as in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, it is certainly possible that he did the same in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, and thus Jerome could have been drawing upon this now lost work.

The second passage from Jerome suggests the alternative. In this instance we see Jerome in his exposition of another biblical book apparently having recourse to Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. In his commentary on Ecclesiastes 12:12, Jerome once more says that even if Scripture consists of many books, if what is said in them 'is referred to God the Word', then it is *unum uolumen*. To support this idea Jerome calls upon Ecclesiastes 12:12, Isaiah 29:11, Proverbs 10:19, and Psalm 39:8, all passages that appear in book five of Origen's Johannine commentary.³² Moreover, this passage is notable in that, whereas in his exegesis of Isaiah 29:11 Jerome grounded Scripture's unity in the Spirit, here in interpreting Ecclesiastes 12:12 he is closer to Origen's book five in grounding this unity in the divine Word. In fact, the parallels are so striking between this passage from Jerome and the fifth book of Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, that it seems very likely that in interpreting Ecclesiastes Jerome either had Origen's gospel exposition open before him or recalled it from his memory. It is possible that when he composed his *Commentary on Isaiah* the same situation held true, and the gospel commentary might then serve as the ultimate source of Jerome's exegesis of Isaiah 29:11-12.

As I said above, it is impossible to know for certain whether Jerome drew upon Origen's

32 Jerome, *In Ecclesiasten* 12:12 (Marcus Adriaen, *S. Hieronymi presbyteri opera, Pars 1, Opera Exegetica* 1, CCSL 72 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1959), 359-60): *Moris est scripturarum, quamuis plures libros, si inter se non discrepent et de eadem re scribant, unum uolumen dicere. . . . Quidquid enim dixeris, si ad eum referatur, qui in principio erat apud Deum, Deus Verbum, unum uolumen est, et innumerabiles libri una lex, unum euangelium nominantur.*

Commentary on the Gospel of John or his *Commentary on Isaiah*. The fact that the mention of the Spirit has no connection with the remainder of Jerome's exegesis of this passage perhaps indicates that both the concept of Scripture as 'one book' as well as its having been 'written by the one Holy Spirit' derive from his source, which would then presumably have been Origen's exposition of the prophet rather than the gospel. Whatever the case, Jerome's debt to Origen in this instance is clear, as is Jerome's role in mediating Origen's exegetical insights to later authors.

Conclusion

If I am right to see a relationship between these three passages, drawing a line from Cyril's *Commentary on Isaiah* back through Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah* ultimately scant to Origen's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* or *Commentary on Isaiah*, then we see here the persistence of an Origenian exegetical tradition beyond the outbreak of the Origenist controversy, even within circles that were most prominent in their opposition to his legacy. Jerome's indebtedness to Origen has long been known³³, but clear links between Origen and Cyril are undoubtedly rarer. Cyril was of course the nephew and episcopal successor of Theophilus, ally of Jerome in the Origenist controversy, so we may assume that he shared his uncle's anti-Origenist sympathies. Nevertheless, the evidence for elucidating Cyril's attitude towards Origen is scant. The only direct

33 Cf. the statement of Pierre Jay regarding Jerome's indebtedness to Origen: 'From the time of the Pauline Commentaries, where he goes so far as textually taking up, at least once, an entire passage of the Alexandrian without attribution (In *Epist. ad Ephesios* III.5.28-29), and throughout his *opus prophetale*, Origen's exegetical work which he never disowned (e.g., *Epist.* 85.4) does not disappear from the background of his Commentaries' ('Jerome,' in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser, *The Bible in Ancient Christianity* 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1112).

role that we can be sure he had in the controversy was his mere attendance at the Synod of the Oak in 403³⁴, and only once in his surviving works does he name Origen.³⁵ On a couple of occasions in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* he opposes the idea of the preexistence of souls, and it is possible that he has Origen in view in these passages, though it is difficult to know for certain.³⁶ Recently a scholar has put together a more solid case that the Alexandrian archbishop had Origen's Johannine commentary before him when he opposed those who held to the angelic nature of John the Baptist.³⁷ Thus far no one has demonstrated a positive usage of Origen by Cyril, and the negative uses are scarce. Nevertheless, as I have here demonstrated, though he probably was unaware of the ultimate source of this tradition, there is little doubt that the archbishop was indebted to the erudition of the earlier Alexandrian, albeit mediated through the biblical

34 Cyril, *ep.* 33.4 (ACO i.1.7, 148).

35 Cyril, *ep.* 81 (ACO iii.201-2).

36 Cf. Domenico Pazzini, 'La critica di Cirillo Alessandrino alla dottrina origenista della preesistenza delle anime', *Cristianesimo nella storia* 9 (1988): 237-79. See also *ibid.*, 'Il prologo di Giovanni in Origene e Cirillo Alessandrino: Un confronto,' in *Origeniana Sexta*, ed. Alain Le Boulluec and Gilles Dorival (Leuven: Peeters, 1995); Marie-Odile Boulnois, 'La résurrection des corps selon Cyrille d'Alexandrie: Une critique de la doctrine origénienne?', *Adamantius* 8 (2002): 83-113; John J. O'Keefe, 'Incorruption, Anti-Origenism, and the Incarnation: Eschatology in the Thought of Cyril of Alexandria', in *The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, ed. Daniel A. Keating and Thomas G. Weinandy (London: T & T Clark, 2003).

37 Dimitrios Zaganas, 'Against Origen And/Or Origenists? Cyril of Alexandria's Rejection of John the Baptist's Angelic Nature in His *Commentary on John* 1:6', *Studia Patristica* (forthcoming 2013).

scholarship of Jerome.

Furthermore, we see in each subsequent author a gradual development of this exegetical tradition. Jerome retains Origen's basic point that Scripture is one book, and also keeps many of his cross-references, but his presentation of them is more compressed, and, as a result, is not as clear as Origen's, especially with his allusion to those who suppose that only the psalms are sealed. Moreover, almost entirely absent in Jerome's discussion is any notion that Scripture is united in Christ, much less in the divine Word who brings the many books of Scripture into his own unity. Instead, Jerome explicitly grounds Scripture's unity in the one Spirit who speaks this one word, whereas the nowhere in the surviving portions of book five of the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* does Origen mention the Spirit.³⁸ With Cyril further shifts are evident. He entirely drops all of Jerome's cross-references, and instead, as we have seen, adds two of his own, one of which hearkens back to Origen's own discussion.³⁹ Thus, in a manner somewhat parallel to Origen, Cyril once again presents Scripture's unity as a message about Christ, yet his discussion is void of the metaphysical speculation about the 'one Word,' and is focused instead on the incarnate Son. Moreover, he retains Jerome's mention of the Spirit who has inspired this 'one book,' and he

38 Although Origen affirms the unity of Scripture in the Spirit in *princ.* praef.4. The Spirit's authorship of Scripture is discussed in *princ.* 4.2.7-9. See also *comm. Mt.* 14.1 where he says the prophecies of the sons of Korah 'were spoken and written as if by one Spirit, one voice, and one soul acting in true harmony.' In the latter passage it is not clear whether it is the Holy Spirit who is in view.

39 None of the passages Jerome cites are particularly common in Cyril's corpus, so it is not surprising that he chose not to use them. This is especially true for the reference to Revelation 5. Citations from the Apocalypse are exceedingly scarce in Cyril's corpus.

thereby relates Scripture's unity to both the Son and the Spirit.

To some degree these shifts may be explained by the contexts of each author. Origen's discussion of Scripture as 'one book' is certainly the longest and most complex, and is undoubtedly not merely an attempt to justify the length of his commentary. Towards the end of his discussion he names the Marcionites as those who deny that Scripture is one book, and it is reasonable to suppose that his entire argument for Scripture's unity is intended as a subtle polemic against the followers of Marcion who were still a recent memory in his own day.⁴⁰ Jerome mentions no such contemporary opponent in his presentation, and the lack of a clear polemical target might be the cause of his more truncated version of Origen's earlier argument. By the time we come to Cyril, all that is left of Origen's original argument is the bare assertion of Scripture as 'one book,' yet in his commentary on Isaiah 29:11-12 a new polemical target has clearly come into view. In keeping with the recurring theme of his commentary to draw a line between the Jews of Isaiah's prophecy, the Jews of the first century, and the Jews of fifth-century Alexandria, the main polemical target of his exegesis are Jews who deny a Christological reading of the law and prophets, a reading which in Cyril's view ties all these books together as a single book. In fact, we may surmise that Cyril carried this comment from Jerome's commentary over into his own because he found it to be a useful principle for underlining the unity of the Scriptures in Christological exegesis.

Furthermore, the example presented here of a small fragment of exegesis reaching from Origen through Jerome to Cyril provides a window into the way the patristic exegetical tradition developed. Studies of patristic exegesis often approach a given author's entire corpus and search for previous authors who seem to share a basic exegetical methodology or hermeneutic. The

Origen, *In Joannem* 5.7.

classic distinction between the so-called Alexandrian and Antiochene schools represents such an attempt to provide a global theory of development into which various authors are then situated. However, attempting to provide a big-picture survey runs the risk of obscuring the way individual traditions could be passed on from one generation to another through their reappropriation and redeployment to address new challenges. By examining small case studies such as this one, we can observe the evolution of the patristic exegetical tradition up close, and discern both the traditionalism and the innovation present in various authors. Thus, for example, even though Origen continued to have lasting influence upon the later patristic exegetical tradition, his legacy was refracted through the individual theologies and concerns of each author. Because Cyril interprets Isaiah 29:11-12 through the lens of his own theology, a casual reader of his commentary would have no idea that the idea of Scripture as 'one book' had its origin in Origen. In this example of these three exegetes' interpretation of Isaiah 29:11, it is clear that Origen cast a long shadow over later patristic commentators, but as one moves further away from the man himself, the contours of his silhouette, while remaining faintly discernible, nevertheless become more indistinct as it gradually blends into multi-faceted eastern tradition.